

Minneapolis Teamsters: A History of Fighting Fascism



Local 544's Union Defense Guard: "This situation called for prompt countermeasures. So Local 544, acting with customary decisiveness, answered the threat by organizing a union defense guard during August 1938."

The same Teamsters local that waged the famous '34 strike also dealt a blow to the organizing attempts of an American pro-nazi group, the Silver Shirts.

In the late '30's several racist, anti-Semitic, anti-labor groups appeared on the political landscape. One of them, the North Carolina based Silver Shirts targeted Minneapolis for recruitment. Encouraged by sections of the Associated Industries (an organization of the rich that had replaced the hated Citizens Alliance), the Silver Shirts held two private meetings in Minneapolis where they declared their willingness to help reign in Union militancy and even threatened to lead vigilante attacks against Teamster Local 544 (the renamed Local 574). When the Minneapolis Teamsters got wind of the Silver Shirts' activity, they acted quickly. The Teamsters organized the Union Defense Guard, and quickly recruited nearly 600 workers. Money was raised to buy rifles and pistols (many members already had firearms for hunting) and training sessions were held. An intelligence unit was created to keep an eye out for any fascist and anti-Semitic literature or activity.

When the national leader of the Silver Shirts arrived in town to address a rally, the Union Defense Guard was dispatched to the auditorium where the rally was to be held, the audience fled, and the Silver Shirt leader never did show up.

The UDG followed up that action with a last-minute notice public drill in the center of the city designed to show the Silver Shirts and their friends among the bosses to step off. Three-hundred unionists wearing black armbands emblazoned with "UDG 544" drilled and marched through downtown. The would-be Hitlers got the message and Silver Shirt organizing ground to a halt, without ever having held a public meeting in this town.

TEAMSTER FACES PRISON FOR FIGHTING FASCISM

Kieran Frazier Knutson, a worker at United Parcel Service, and a member of Teamsters Local 638 faces up to 10 years in prison and \$20,000 in fines for defending himself against a neo-nazi attack at an anti-racist demonstration last fall. Kieran is a long-time anti-racist/anti-fascist organizer who has worked against neo-nazi and Ku Klux Klan activity and against racist police brutality. Kieran has also been active in union struggles at work, including the UPS contract and the disputes over weight limits.

The demonstration

On October 22nd 1993, the Progressive Student Organization and others held an anti-racist demonstration to counter an announced rally of neo-nazis on the U of M campus. Neo-nazis had attempted to rally on that same date, in the same place, the two previous years. The anti-racist rally of over 100 people included members of Teamsters Rank and File Caucus Local 320 (U of M janitors).

About an hour into the rally, two neo-nazi skinheads showed up decked out in "white power" gear. The two scuffled with the demonstration security (including Kieran) and several people were hurt. The police showed up and tackled and arrested one of the nazis, Daniel Simmer, as he was lunging at demonstrators with a pair of brass knuckles.

Weirdly, months later the state brought felony assault charges against Kieran. He goes to trial August 2nd. Kieran faces two counts of felony assault, based almost entirely on statements from Simmer and his fiancée Amy Forman, the other white-power skinhead at the demo. The charges carry a minimum prison sentence of 36 months.

The racist right on the rise

From Germany to South Africa to Louisiana, a new generation of fascists are attacking immigrants, planting bombs and running for public office. Seizing on the crummy world-wide economy and people's growing alienation, neo-nazis are recruiting from the formerly well-off white middle class and working class, especially among its youth. They preach white supremacy, anti-semitism, male supremacy and homophobia, and they're gaining a mass base in many parts of the world.

The Twin Cities are not immune. Several racist

organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and the Northern Hammer Skinheads, which Daniel Simmer belongs to, are active here. They've organized, vandalized, and carried out violent attacks.

Although it doesn't make the papers, Twin Cities racists usually get stopped cold. A creative and militant anti-fascist movement keeps the fascists small, keeping a constant vigilance against any organizing attempts on the part of the fascists. In cities where there hasn't been this kind of resistance, like Portland, and Dallas, neo-nazis have been strong among a section of white youth. They've beaten and even murdered people of color, Jews, gays and lesbians, and anti-racist activists.

Kieran needs your help

It's ludicrous that these charges have even been brought up, and the fact that the State is using the name of the people to support the allegations of a neo-nazi skinhead is outright disgusting. What in effect this means is that the State is making African-Americans, Jews, American Indians, gays and lesbians, Union members and everyone else who works in the state of Minnesota fund a neo-nazi prosecution of an anti-racist activist. We ask you to write and call the County Attorney and express your outrage at the charges brought against Kieran.

DEMAND ALL CHARGES AGAINST KIERAN BE DROPPED!

Call or write:

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Anti-Fascist Defense Committee
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